

→ Winning Grants ←

Can you count the number of grant alerts you have seen in a newsletter or on the Internet last month? After reading the details, how often did you fantasize about winning a grant but ended up feeling too overwhelmed to apply? Chances are you have heard about educators using grant dollars to supplement their schools' budget, but you are not sure how to join them in the quest. There is no big secret to winning a grant; the key is to have the courage to try! Start with finding the answers to *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *how*.

Who Will Benefit from Your Project?

Before starting, it's important to be clear about what you want to accomplish and who you want to help. The focus of your grant application should not be on the materials to be purchased; that's a common mistake grant writers make. For example, they present the purpose of the project as "to purchase X reading program for our students." That is not the purpose. In this case, the purpose would be "to increase reading test scores of failing students."

As a general rule, I believe that if you are part of an education agency, every project you attempt to get funded should be built around the children. If you lose sight of the fact that it has to benefit the children, you risk not making a compelling argument about the long-term benefits of your project. Be clear about the population you will be targeting and why. Remember to use accurate and up-to-date research to support your reasons. It will be hard for anyone evaluating grant applications to argue with valid data.

What Makes Your Project Any Different from the Next?

We can all rattle off a laundry list of things we would buy for our programs if we had extra money. Avoid the habit of asking for things you want rather than the things you need. Sure, it would be great to have a computer for



By Parisa Tahouri

every student in your school, but can you do with 15 laptops on a cart that can be shared among classrooms?

Make certain that you are clear about the goals and objectives of your project and what you need to complete the project. A comprehensive project will have measurable goals aligned to the funder's requirements, as well as the organization's mission. You should always use statistics to demonstrate the importance of your project. For example, if your project is designed to improve the test scores of dyslexic students, then try to include data about: (a) number of dyslexic children in the United States, your state, as well as your district; (b) cost for early intervention versus long-term support services; and (c) proven methods for addressing the educational needs of dyslexic children.

You should also ensure the evaluators have a sense of your project's uniqueness. Remember that your project will be competing with others; it is crucial that you demonstrate not only the importance of the project, but also its long-term value and sustainability. If your project can be replicated at other schools, making that fact clear will help you gain a competitive edge. Keep in mind that no one wants to invest in something that is short-term or isolated when there are so many long-term projects that can benefit students for years to come.

Where Should You Look for Funding?

The answer to this question is simple—the Internet! The Internet has made research as easy as click, click, and click. Your State Department of Education has a special section for grant announcements and applications, as well as training updates. Be sure to visit the site on a regular basis.

You might be asking yourself, "Where do I look for foundation grants?" The Internet remains a favorite starting point. There are several wonderful Web sites where you can sign up for newsletters that will alert you of upcoming deadlines. Here are a few of my preferred links:

- ✓ **The Foundation Center**—a non-profit organization focused on collecting, organizing, and communicating information on all foundation and corporation grants <www.fdncenter.org>
- ✓ **eSchool News Online**—a grants-and-funding clearinghouse that allows you to explore ongoing grant awards and opportunities, and gain expert insight on grant-seeking <www.eschoolnews.com>
- ✓ **Fundsnet Services Online**—a well-organized Web site that provides grant-seekers with information on financial resources available on the Internet <www.fundsnet.com>

When Is the Best Time to Start?

If you ask any professional grant writer about the best time to start your hunt for funds, the answer will most likely be last year! Believe it or not, you have to travel down a long, dark, winding road to get to the pot of gold; the last thing you want to do is wait until all the planets are aligned to submit a proposal.

To be successful, it will take time, motivation, persistence, and conviction. This is a competitive field, so staying focused at all times is a requirement. A successful organization will have a funding strategy in place with clear goals, objectives, and realistic expectations. You must devote a lot of time to research and planning. Many people become so focused on finding the next grant opportunity, they forget to research and plan. This results in higher rejection rates, which causes frustration, a sense of failure, and burnout. If you find yourself in an organization that relies on grants, you'll need to consider grant research and writing an ongoing task. Keep in mind that most grant applications will take anywhere from three months to a year to be reviewed and awarded.

How Do You Prepare a Proposal?

Most grants have the same basic components. Although the components may vary from one opportunity to the next, you can expect to see the following on a regular basis. By familiarizing

- Take the time to mourn—it's healthy!
- Channel those feelings in the right direction; refine, refine, refine!
- Pull out a pen and write a nice letter thanking the funder for taking the time to review your proposal. The key is to make a positive impression because relationships are important in the grant process.
- Ask for the evaluator's comments. Read them without getting defensive; the comments are the key to your future success, so put your feelings aside.

yourself with these, you'll avoid being intimidated by the application. The key components include:

- ✓ **Executive Summary**—an overview that summarizes all major components. Although this is the first section of a grant application, wait until the end to write it and remember not to introduce new information in this section.
- ✓ **Organizational Overview**—a succinct description of your school's mission, programs, students, and staff to show your ability to successfully implement the proposed project.
- ✓ **Statement of Need**—a clear and persuasive statement that is supported by facts, evidence, and statistics to communicate the need for the project.
- ✓ **Project Description**—a comprehensive roadmap of your implementation plan, including goals, objectives, activities, staffing, and evaluation.
- ✓ **Budget**—a breakdown of how the grant dollars will be used.

Keep in mind that a grant proposal is a persuasive document that sells your project to the funding agency. In order to be effective, make sure your writing is brief and simple. Although it's tempting, avoid educational jargon and complex vocabulary at the risk of intimidating your evaluator.

Remember the writing rules we

learned in college? Let's review:

- Use strong, short, clear sentences.
- Present information in a logical order.
- Simple words are your friends; avoid the urge to recite the dictionary.
- Opt for active language as opposed to passive.
- Don't use abbreviations. Usually they make sense to you, not to your evaluators.
- Don't plagiarize. If you are using research, then cite the source.
- Typographical errors happen! Make sure you proofread more than once.
- And most importantly, make sure your proposal is interesting to read. Add a little personality—it goes a long way.

A Final Word for Grant Writers

Ever-increasing budget cuts have forced public school administrators to explore alternative sources to implement No Child Left Behind requirements and their existing programs. Today, grant writing is no longer optional; it is a requirement. A successful grant writer becomes a precious asset to any organization.

If you ask most grant writers how they got started, you would most likely hear that they were dragged into the world of grants without their consent and eventually got labeled the "grant writer" as soon as they won a couple of grants! If you decided to read the rest of this article after finishing the first paragraph, then chances are that either you are personally interested in grant writing or you have been selected as the lucky person to take it on at your organization. My biggest piece of advice for the beginner is to be proactive in your research and writing efforts. Don't wait for an announcement or application to force you to react. You can improve your grant writing, as well as your success rate, by ensuring you stay a couple of steps ahead of the game. I believe that grant writing is an ongoing, never-ending process, so make a list of "fundable ideas" with clear goals and objectives. Then start thinking about how you would implement them if you had the funds. Remember, every new project starts with an idea—so dream it, define it, and design a project around it! ■

Parisa Tahouri is a national grants manager from Walnut Creek, California.

Copyright of Library Media Connection is the property of Linworth Publishing, Inc.. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.